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# Spaces of the Border – a Practice-theoretical Cultural Studies Perspective in Border Studies\*

CHRISTIAN WILLE

## Abstract

*This paper examines how practice-theoretical considerations can be linked with those of a spatial-theoretical nature and translated into a heuristic of spatial analysis from a cultural studies perspective. This question focus results from the understanding that space should be regarded as an emergent aspect of the social and that it is still largely insufficiently defined in Border Studies. Drawing on a number of different spatial concepts, the paper first presents an action-theoretical notion of space and reformulates it in a practice-theoretical framework. It constitutes the point of departure for the development of the spaces of the border model with its analytical categories of social practices, practical knowledge as well as physical-material and social-structural aspects. The diversity of connections between these analytical categories have proven to be heuristically particularly useful.*

Space, border, praxeology, Border Studies, cross-border commuting

## Zusammenfassung

### **Räume der Grenze – eine praxistheoretische Perspektive in den kulturwissenschaftlichen Border Studies**

*In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, wie praxistheoretische mit raumtheoretischen Überlegungen verknüpft und in eine Heuristik der kulturwissenschaftlichen Raumanalyse überführt werden können. Diese Fragestellung resultiert aus der Einsicht, dass Raum als ein emergenter Aspekt des Sozialen zu betrachten ist und in den Border Studies noch weitgehend unterbestimmt ist. Unter Rückgriff auf verschiedene Raumkonzepte wird zunächst ein handlungstheoretisches Verständnis von Raum vorgestellt und praxistheoretisch reformuliert. Es bildet den Ausgangspunkt für die Entwicklung des Modells Räume der Grenze mit seinen Analyse kategorien soziale Praktiken, praktisches Wissen sowie physisch-materiale und sozial-strukturelle Aspekte. Von heuristischem Nutzen erweisen sich besonders die vielfältigen Verbindungen zwischen diesen Analyse kategorien.*

Raum, Grenze, Praxeologie, Border Studies, Grenzraumstudien, Grenzpendler

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## Introduction

The recent introductory volume “Kultur – Von den Cultural Studies bis zu den Visual Studies” (“Culture – From Cultural Studies to Visual Studies”) (MOEBIUS 2012a) gives an overview of key fields of research of Cultural Studies. They share a common interest in materiality, mediality and artefacts as well as a socio- and cultural-critical perspective on societal processes. A particular feature of Cultural Studies is, according to Stephan MOEBIUS (2012b, p. 7) “the practice-theoretical perspective originating from cultural sociology”<sup>1</sup>, which defines the social neither on the basis of the agents nor of the structures. In practice-theoretical considerations the locus of the social is the practice of culture which is located, structured and observable in the ‘in-between’. This perspectivation of *doing culture*, which is gaining increasing acceptance, can be attributed to the “crisis of the *rational choice* approaches with their empirically implausible action-theoretical model assumptions”<sup>2</sup> (SCHMIDT 2012, pp. 11f.), as well as to the increased attention for the material and, last but not least, to the crisis of the *grand theories* (see SCHMIDT 2012, pp. 11f.). This is due to the fact that while the latter posit an inviable (or no longer viable) notion of society, practice-theoretical approaches favour a post-structuralist reading: Society is here not assumed to be a given, stable and geographically delineated unit of analysis, but rather an entity that continuously constitutes and deconstitutes itself (see BONACKER 2008, p. 40). This means that societies need to be studied in their constitutive processes and thus via social practices. These would then require to be addressed as “continuing processes of socialisation [...] – open-ended social performances in contexts that are specifically definable in space and time, materially

situated and interlinked”<sup>3</sup> (SCHMIDT 2012, p. 12).

Building on the above, this paper examines a dimension of the social that is grounded in the practice-theoretical perspective, frequently mentioned (see SCHMIDT 2012, p. 256; SCHATZKI 2010, 2002; RECKWITZ 2010, p. 186; RECKWITZ 2008, p. 91) but rarely formulated in detail. The paper enquires how practice-theoretical considerations can be linked with those of a spatial-theoretical nature and translated into a heuristic of spatial analysis from a cultural studies perspective. On the one hand, the question focus results from the insight gained by Henri Lefebvre that “(social) space is a (social) product” (LEFEBVRE 1991, p. 30), according to which space should be understood as an emergent aspect of the social. On the other, this question focus is relevant, since despite the spatial turn (see, among others, GÜNZEL 2010; DÖRING and THIELMANN 2008; BACHMANN-MEDICK 2007; SCHROER 2006; Löw 2001) the concept of space is, for the most part, still insufficiently defined where it is particularly called for, namely in the Border Studies which, as a transdisciplinary academic field, address a wide range of research topics (see, among others, WASTL-WALTER 2011, pp. 11ff.; VAN HOUTUM and VAN NAERSEN 2002). Here, a social-constructivist strand of research has emerged that focuses on bordering processes as (powerful) establishments, shifts or relativisations of social demarcations (see VAN HOUTUM et al. 2005). The notion of space is of some significance here since processes of de- and re-bordering can be geographically localised and because binarily encoded differentiations such as We/the Others are often cast in spatial metaphors. In addition one can identify a pragmatic strand of research which is usually oriented along political borders and examines the dynamics and effects of geopolitical processes, supranational organisations and cross-border flows (commodities, services, capital, people). The

pragmatic Border Studies thus favour research contexts in which political borders (as barriers or bridges) and nationally or regionally defined spatial entities play a key role. The problem here is that – contrary to Lefebvre’s insight – the social is primarily conceived from a spatial perspective and that the geopolitical order does not grant a theoretical space to permanent border crossings. This refers to social phenomena that display trans migratory features in general and to those in border regions in particular. In other words: phenomena that establish themselves in the crossing of the border, that can be topicalised as social contexts obliquely aligned to national borders and which, from a geopolitical perspective, merely represent forms of the ‘in-between’. These include for instance flows or people that cross a national border in a regular and circular fashion in order to shop, pursue leisure activities or work in the neighbouring country. In doing so, they call into question the regulatory model of geopolitical spaces that are identified by national borders.

In this paper phenomena such as these – henceforth referred to here by the model term of ‘cross-border commutings’ – are relieved of their in-between status with the aid of the practice-theoretical perspective, and possible avenues for an empirical analysis under spatial-material aspects will be pointed out. For this purpose the model *spaces of the border*, in which spatial and practice-theoretical perspectives converge in a productive way, is developed as a possible heuristic of Border Studies with a cultural studies approach. First, drawing on various concepts of space and their reception, an action-theoretical understanding of space is presented which – reformulated in a practice-theoretical framework – forms the point of departure for *spaces of the border*. The analytical categories of the model include social practices, practical knowledge as well as physical-material and social-structural aspects as they are appropriated and produced praxis-logically by cross-border commutings in transborder contexts.

1 Translation of: „Aus der Kulturosoziologie herrührende praxistheoretische Perspektive“

2 Translation of: „Die Krise der *Rational-Choice*-Ansätze mit ihren empirisch unplausiblen handlungstheoretischen Modellannahmen“

3 Translation of: „Fortlaufende Prozesse der Vergesellschaftung [...] – soziale Vollzüge in räumlich und zeitlich konkret bestimmbaren, materiell situierten und miteinander verknüpften Kontexten“

## Space: Substance – Structure – Meaning

The point of departure of the following considerations is space. Asked what exactly space is the social geographer Peter WEICHHART (2008, p. 75) answered: "That is the unsolved question of geography."<sup>4</sup> According to WEICHHART, this status of the concept is due to the fact that there are a great number of notions of space circulating within and outside the discipline that are not only interpreted differently but are at the same time closely interwoven with each other. In order to establish a degree of systematisation in the field of spaces I will in the following give an overview of three different interpretations of the concept of space which, in the subsequent line of argument, require a critical discussion of the concept of agency.

The first interpretation, the *absolute-substantialist conception of space*, conceives space as an actually existing element of the physical-material world. It encompasses both geographically localisable land surface segments and the space that is abstracted from physical-material elements. Space in the sense of the earth's surface refers to a segment of the physical world that is defined and visible through dominant features, like for instance a particular conurbation. Here, the spatial borders are defined along features of the specific land segment and are usually drawn imprecisely. In addition, space is distinguished as a three-dimensional extension in the sense of a container, *within* which objects, people or events occur. This notion was formulated in the 18th century by Isaac Newton under the impression of classical mechanics as follows: "Absolute space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable" (NEWTON quoted in Löw 2001, p. 25). Space is here attributed a static essentiality of its own that exists independently from other objects. It is therefore about "that 'thing' that remains if one were to

take the mountain range out of a mountain region" (WEICHHART 2008, p. 77).<sup>5</sup> This absolutist conception of space has in the past become rooted in many academic disciplines. For instance in geography, where Friedrich RATZEL (1966) established the concept of living space as a container for forms of life, culture, society and economy (see WERLEN 2009, p. 149). The natural determinacy of the social that this concept implies shaped the discipline partly as late as into the second half of the 20th century and refers to the notion that space impacts the objects and the people that are in it. The absolute-substantialist conception of space has partly found its way into the social sciences with the assumption that in nation states, territory, nation, state and culture conflate to a unity that operates internally in a homogenising and inclusive way and externally in a closed and exclusive way. Long before the internationalisation of the 1990s cross-border commutings have shown that the fringes of such "spatial figures"<sup>6</sup> (WERLEN 1997, p. 44) are porous and that the character of homogeneity or closeness of societies is untenable (see WILLE 2012). Nevertheless, it was only under the impression of the dynamics of globalisation that the container model came to be discussed more critically. It was for instance questioned whether the 'inhabitants' of national containers can really be regarded as agents of macro-structural logics and which explanations, if any, the congruence of territory, nation, state and culture can (still) provide. With concepts such as "denationalisation", "deterritorialisation" or "world society" (see MAU 2007, pp. 35f.) and the emerging despatialisation thesis, the status of the absolute-substantialist conception of space changed: The thesis posits that as the social is emancipating itself from space due to modern technologies and media, space is increasingly losing its significance. Even though the despatialisation thesis – as a constantly

recurring topos of technical innovations (see SCHROER 2008, p. 128) – attempts to overcome the notion of container space, the latter remains a constitutive element in the argumentation for the 'disappearance of space'. This is because the geopolitical regulatory model of nation states continues to be the point of reference of space-related considerations, even though this order is circumvented due to the fact that distances in natural space can be overcome effortlessly and due to the "the free-flowing and undermining currents of commodities, data and people" (SCHROER 2008, p. 135).<sup>7</sup> The analysis from a social sciences and cultural studies perspective of such 'despatialising' phenomena has sensitised scholars to the fact that space has by no means come to an end. On the contrary, mobility and interconnectedness are bringing about a new unfolding of space. The thus evoked spatialisation thesis addresses the numerous spatial references of the social which often do not conform to any national logical systems of order, but are aligned obliquely to national borders and may be described as social, virtual or transnational spaces. What they have in common is a social-constructive and relational perspective that has done much to promote the (re)discovered interest in space – for instance as Space Studies (see KAJETZKE and SCHROER 2012).

The *relational-constructivist conception of space* refers, like the absolute-substantialist one, to the physical-material world, but here the emphasis is on the (assumed) characteristics of the latter. Space as relation comes into focus when the dispositions and/or the juxtaposition of physical-material elements that can be localised on a land surface segment are addressed. The relational concept can be credited to, among others, Albert Einstein, who in his Theory of Relativity disproved the notion of space as a superior reality. He proceeded from the assumption that space constitutes a structure of relations between bodies and artefacts

5 Translation of: „jenes ‚Ding‘, das übrig bleibt, wenn man gleichsam aus einem Gebirgsraum das Gebirge herausnimmt“

6 Translation of: „Raumgestalten“

4 Translation of: „Das ist die ungelöste Grundfrage der Geographie“

7 Translation of: „umspülenden und unterhöhenden Ströme von Waren, Daten und Menschen“

(see EINSTEIN quoted in Löw 2001, p. 34). Thus space is not conceived as something independent from a content, but it is rather physical-material elements that play a constitutive role here. The relational structure of bodies and artefacts therefore provide a way of describing spatial conditions that are changeable in their relationality. This understanding is generally implied wherever transactions, relations, flows or networks are considered. This is the case for instance in relational economic geography, which turns away from the spatial-economic approach and develops the spatial through a localisable network of socio-economic relationships (see BATHELT and GLÜCKLER 2003). In political science the relational-constructivist perspective is found in integration theories, e.g. in transnational regionalism. It aims at a European process of integration 'from below' via trans-border and interregional cooperation as well as via the establishment of transnational networks between so-called sub-national entities (see SCHMITT-EGNER 2005, p. 148). Also in the sociology of migration the spatial is conceived as relational-constructivist when a transnational social space develops through (trans) national migration flows. Ludger PRIES (2008, p. 195) defines this as „relatively permanent, condensed configurations of social everyday practices, systems of symbols and artefacts, distributed across a number of locations or unfolding between a number of surface areas. They are rooted [...] in different territories or locales which in turn are woven into other social-spatial entities e.g. of national container societies”.<sup>8</sup>

The approaches presented here by way of example address relationships and deduce spatial structures from them. Physical-material elements and their relational structure are thus no longer relegated to a surrounding container, but constitute

the space themselves. The relational-constructivist perspective thus provides a first approach for considering cross-border commutings in terms of spatial theory also in the pragmatic Border Studies, since their spatial constructions can be reconstructed via the bodies and artefacts arranged in cross-border activities. In mapping the cross-border *spacing* (see Löw 2011, p. 158) there is however the danger of over-emphasising the autonomy of cross-border commutings and losing sight of the influence of (natural) spatial conditions, of national borders and the related implications for the production of spatial structures. KAJETZKE and SCHROER (2010, p. 203) argue for taking both aspects into account: “the power of spatial structures” and “the creative force of individuals”.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the relational-constructivist perspective carries the danger that space is merely redrawn *descriptively* via flows of transactions, relational networks or network configurations and that the quality of these structures – as a meaningfully constituted spatiality – is neglected. While it is possible to distinguish the descriptive and the qualitative dimension of space, they form two firmly interlocked aspects of space production and their analysis. This becomes clear with the social-constitutive conception of space which puts the emphasis not so much on the spatial substance or on spatial structures than on the level of meaning.

In the *social-constitutive understanding of space*, the above-developed position that the spatial possesses no essentiality of its own but should be conceived from the social is supplemented with the level of meaning. The first point to discuss here is the meaning of experienced space which refers to the subjective perception of dispositional structures. This involves an experienced space, such as, for instance, the ‘student quarter’ the representation of which is shaped by specific interpretations, evaluations and memories. An empirical access to such repre-

sentations is provided by *mental map* research which attempts “to ascertain how individuals depict their spatial environment subjectively in their mind”<sup>10</sup> (WERLEN 2004, p. 286). Such depictions, which Löw (2001, p. 159) calls synthetic performances – in the sense of mentally subsuming subjects and artefacts into spaces –, open up a first approach to the kind of meaning-oriented spaces that cross-border commutings produce in cross-border contexts.

A further interpretation of the social-constitutive conception of space focuses on the subject’s active and meaningful interaction with its social and material environment. The assumption is that bodies and artefacts have no inherent meaning, but that it is only in the interaction with them that they become meaningful and significant for space-related considerations: “They [space or materialities] only acquire meaning in performances of agency and under specific social conditions”<sup>11</sup> (WERLEN 1999, p. 223). The epistemological interest here is directed to the question of how space is constituted in its material and meaningful dimension through the subject’s agency. This brings processes of spatial production into focus which on the one hand require the reconstruction of dispositional structures and on the other become accessible via the reconstruction of structures of meaning that are produced and take effect in performances of agency.

In German-speaking countries this perspective on space was promoted by Benno WERLEN. In the “social geography of everyday regionalisations”<sup>12</sup> (WERLEN 1997, 2010) there was no longer to be a ‘dismemberment’ of the social into spatial categories, and instead the focus was to be on the constitutive process of spatial relationships. Following the despatialisation thesis, WERLEN (2008a, p. 379)

8 Translation of: „Relativ dauerhafte, auf mehrere Orte verteilte bzw. zwischen mehreren Flächenräumen sich aufspannende verdichtete Konfigurationen von sozialen Alltagspraktiken, Symbolsystemen und Artefakten. Sie sind [...] in verschiedenen Territorien bzw. locales verankert, die wiederum in andere sozial-räumliche Einheiten – z.B. von nationalen Container-Gesellschaften – eingewoben sind.“

9 Translation of: „Die Wirkmacht räumlicher Strukturen“ ... „die schöpferische Kraft der Individuen“

10 Translation of: „Festzustellen, wie Individuen ihre räumliche Umwelt subjektiv in ihrem Bewusstsein abbilden“

11 Translation of: „Sie [Raum oder Materialitäten] werden erst in Handlungsvollzügen unter bestimmten sozialen Bedingungen bedeutsam.“

12 Translation of: „Sozialgeographie alltäglicher Regionalisierungen“



argues that due to the de-anchoring mechanisms of late modernity space no longer forms a defining factor, and because of this the explanation of phenomena in physical-material categories falls short. Rather, spatial analyses should concentrate, in the sense of the spatialisation thesis, on the subjects' "doing geography"<sup>13</sup> (WERLEN 2007a, p. 28) or on the "geographies practically enacted by them"<sup>14</sup> (LIPPUNER 2005, p. 31). As an analytical point of departure for this unfolding of space WERLEN (2007a, p. 16 and 231) proposes the everyday actions of the subjects, in order to trace the spatial relationships produced therein. In descriptive terms space expresses "the diverse relationalisations of the physical subjects with other physical-material circumstances"<sup>15</sup> (WERLEN 2007b, p. 10); in qualitative terms space signifies the subjects' attributions and interpretations of meaning produced in the framework of relationalisations. These then comprise the aspects of the social-constitutive conception of space that can only be separated for analytical purposes: On the one hand the relational dispositional structures of artefacts and bodies that are produced by subjects in everyday actions; on the other, the attributions and interpretations of meaning with respect to the material and social world that inform everyday actions and take social effect.

The social-constitutive conception of space with its references to the relational-constructivist notion of space provides Border Studies with an action-theoretical approach to cross-border commutings that has been expanded by the dimension of meaning. The presumed social contingency of space ('doing space'), which can also unfold obliquely to national borders, circumvents the theoretical conflict with nation state systems and can give empirical contours to the hitherto invisible in-between. It is the subjects' cross-border doing geography which is now the point

of departure of spatial analysis and requires a further discussion of the concept of agency.

### Agency: Purposes – Norms – Knowledge – Bodies

Building on the action-theoretical understanding of space developed above, I will now address the question how a concept of agency has to be designed for it to be able to describe and analyse subject-centred constitutions of space in cross-border contexts. Point of departure of the following considerations is again WERLEN (2008b, p. 282), who defines doing geography as an "activity in the sense of an intentional act in whose constitution both socio-cultural, subjective and physical-material components are significant".<sup>16</sup> WERLEN here brings intentions and purposes into the picture to which the subjects gear their activities, with, in turn, physical-material elements acquiring a certain significance. This process orients itself "more or less consciously towards an intersubjective [...] context of meaning" in the sense of a "socially and culturally prepared orientational grid" which "exists independently from the acting individual"<sup>17</sup> (WERLEN 2008b, p. 287). In its orientation towards purpose and rules the understanding of action presented here ties in with classical approaches to explaining agency which would need to be discussed with a view to agency in cross-border contexts.

Turning first to the *purpose-oriented agency approaches* (e.g. Max WEBER, Vilfredo PARETO), these are to be found particularly in the field of economics and include such theories that explain individual agency with forms of self-interest and cost-profit considerations. The *homo economicus* is assumed to have a rational orientation towards agency according to which an individual gears his or her be-

haviour consciously to specific purposes – on the basis of information and abilities for the attainment of his or her ends. The social then represents the sum of the concerted individual actions that emerges in interactive situations (see RECKWITZ 2004, pp. 307f.; RECKWITZ 2003, p. 287). Cross-border commutings can indeed be assumed to be guided by certain forms of self-interest and cost-profit calculation, because cross-border doing geography is often triggered by personal profit maximisation due to price differences, (net) income differences or different offers in the leisure sector on either side of a national border (see WILLE 2012, pp. 219ff.). Nevertheless, a concept of agency that takes solely purposes and interests into account falls short, because particularly in the case of cross-border everyday actions subjects cannot be assumed to have comprehensive information concerning rational assessment and expectability to achieve their ends.

The *norm-oriented approaches* (e.g. Talcott PARSONS, Robert MERTON, Émile DURKHEIM) which are represented with the model figure of the *homo sociologicus* explain the orderedness of action with expectations, values and roles. Here collectively shared norms of agency as well as the abilities of the individuals to respect norms take the place of goals of agency. In this way the social is no longer considered a sum of aggregated individual actions but rather a stable normative consensus which enables and regulates an intersubjective coordination of potentially contradictory actions (see RECKWITZ 2003, p. 287). Before applying this regulative principle to cross-border agency one first needs to take a critical look at the presumed normative-integrated collectives. This is necessary because cross-border doing geography comprises at least two such collectives, on either side of a national border, who as a rule are presumed to have in each case a different normative consensus on what constitutes (il)legitimate agency. For cross-border commutings the issue of the observance of norms, which presumes knowledge of the social rules on either side of the bor-

13 Translation of: „Geographie-Machen“

14 Translation of: „Praktisch inszenierten Geographien“

15 Translation of: „Werden die unterschiedlichen Relationalisierungen der körperlichen Subjekte mit anderen physisch-materiellen Gegebenheiten [...] zum Ausdruck“ gebracht

16 Translation of: „[eine] „Tätigkeit im Sinne eines intentionalen Aktes“ ... „bei dessen Konstitution sowohl sozial-kulturelle, subjektive wie auch physisch-materielle Komponenten bedeutsam sind“

17 Translation of: „Mehr oder weniger bewusst an einem intersubjektiven [...] Bedeutungszusammenhang [im Sinne eines] „gesellschaftlich und kulturell vorbereitete[n] Orientierungsraster[s]“, [das] „unabhängig vom einzelnen Handelnden besteht“

der, would present itself as a particular prominent one. However, this perspective implies that the social is conceived as a factor of the spatial – and not the other way round – and that the creative-productive element of a possible shift of action routines is not taken into account. Already at this point norm-oriented approaches show themselves to be of little use in explaining everyday actions which particularly in cross-border contexts are characterised by discontinuities, ambivalences as well as cultural change (see BOECKLER 2012, p. 48).

*Cultural-theoretical and knowledge-oriented approaches* (e.g. Alfred SCHÜTZ, Claude LÉVI-STRAUSS, Roland BARTHES) explain agency not via individual purposes or collective norms but rather via systems of knowledge. These form a criterion for the symbolic organisation of reality and for the attributions of meaning subjects base their actions on. Accordingly, the *homo significans* is also presumed to possess an orderedness of agency, with rules that are not defined normatively but cognitively and operate regulatively in processes of symbolic representation and attribution of meaning. In this way actions are linked to cultural codes, systems of symbols and meanings on the basis of which subjects interpret and reproduce reality in a concerted way. While not dismissing purposes and social norms as agency-relevant factors, this approach attempts to reconstruct why subjects regard particular purposes as desirable and particular norms as adequate to the situation (see RECKWITZ 2004, pp. 314ff.; RECKWITZ 2003, pp. 288f.). If cognitive systems of knowledge are used as a regulative principle of cross-border doing geography, new problems arise due to the fact that they are seen as being intersubjective and stable. This is illustrated graphically by Alfred SCHÜTZ (1972) with the example of the stranger: He reveals himself as such through the 'distinct' expectations of normality and systems of knowledge he brings with him. The status of stranger is not overcome until he has 'learnt' the corresponding background assumptions and systems of rel-

evance of the so-called receiving culture. Thus, in cases where different systems of knowledge encounter each other SCHÜTZ argues for the model of assimilation that implies a complete absorption into the normality-producing cultural codes of the receiving culture and allows neither discontinuities of action routines nor a plurality of (cross-borderwise circulating) choices that offer sense and meaning. Even though one can hardly speak of a receiving culture in the context of cross-border commutings, one nevertheless has to assume interpretative indeterminacies in cross-border doing geography which – in an inter-culturalistic fashion – may be traced back to different systems of symbols and knowledge structures and in which the creative-productive element of agency disregarded here would be particularly called for.

Besides the inherent problems of the approaches of the explanation of agency presented above, there are further aspects that are problematic for the space-sensitive analysis of everyday actions in cross-border contexts. These include the systems of rules and contexts of meaning that are considered to exist outside of agency and operate as normative or cognitive patterns within the subjects. On the one hand, this approach raises the thorny question – particularly in cross-border contexts – of the 'proper' performance of 'accepted' systems of rules and symbols and marginalises subjective agency. On the other hand it only focuses on the mental dimension of agency; the observable agency and its materialisations remain neglected. Practice-theoretical approaches, by contrast, do not only take the physical performance of agency into account, but also operate with the term of practices, thereby introducing a number of theoretical and for the question focus of the paper promising implications.

*Practice-theoretical approaches:* The practice-theoretical approaches (e.g. Pierre BOURDIEU, Anthony GIDDENS, Theodore SCHATZKI, Bruno LATOUR), as a social-constructivist variety of culture theories, develop – with their respective emphases – a perspective on agency that

includes cultural contingency and the physical interaction with the social and material environment. Agency is not understood as an isolated single activity with 'underlying' purposes and norms, but rather as a concatenation of self-reproducing and actualising practices that are materially embedded and socially understandable. Social practices are then understood as "physical representations of 'practical common sense' (Mauss)" and "meaningful performances of understanding" which are linked by "specific forms of implicit knowledge"<sup>18</sup> and interact with concrete artefacts and natural things (MOEBIUS 2008, p. 59 and 61). The knowledge mentioned here neither possesses a suprasubjective existence, nor is it 'stored' in the consciousness of the *homo in praxi*. Rather it is allocated to the practical performance where it takes immediate effect and forms the frame for the way "how concrete things are to be interpreted in a practice and how they are to be dealt with practically, which 'practical meaning' can be developed"<sup>19</sup> (RECKWITZ 2010, p. 193). Correspondingly, the social should here be sought neither in the normative concertedness of actions nor in the intersubjectivity of cultural codes, but in the physical processes of the practices in which social orders are produced, changed and reproduced praxis-logically. Social practices thus constitute a contingent and structuring element of social reality in which discontinuities can occur and typical activities continuously form anew (see SCHMIDT 2012, p. 10).

Practice-theoretical approaches seem to lend themselves well to an action-theoretical spatial analysis in cross-border contexts. They offer points of reference for a theoretical and empirical consideration of bodies and artefacts that can be further elaborated along spatial-theoretical lines. Furthermore, in emphasising the processual dimension of agency it is

<sup>18</sup> Translation of: „Körperliche Darstellungen ‚praktischer Vernunft‘ (Mauss)“ ... „sinnhafter Versteheleistungen“ ... „spezifische Formen des impliziten Wissens“

<sup>19</sup> Translation of: „Wie konkrete Dinge in einer Praktik zu interpretieren und wie sie praktisch zu handhaben sind, welcher ‚praktische Sinn‘ entwickelbar ist“

possible to surmount the purportedly supersubjective existence of systems of rules and contexts of meanings, because practical knowledge – that does not pertain to observance of norms, spatial areas of validity or to the idea of socially integrated collectives – is produced performatively in physical practices. Therefore it is not knowledge as a feature of cross-border commutings or a spatial range of validity for specific knowledge structures either side of a national border that is the central question here, but rather which knowledge can take effect, be actualised and produced or reconstructed in particular social practices (see RECKWITZ 2003, pp. 291f.; HÖRNING and REUTER 2004, p. 11). Thus knowledge and agency should not be seen as separate of each other but intertwined, in order to identify explanations for subjective agency and social structures. This approach relativates guiding systems of rules and symbolic orders, because practical knowledge – as a physical articulation – is assumed as being contingent and changeable, which favours the productive-creative element in the encounter of different choices that offer sense and meaning. We can establish that a practice-theoretical understanding of agency is well-suited for the question focus of this paper, which is why in the following I will discuss *social practices* and combine the spatial- and practice-theoretical considerations developed above, in order to make them productive for a spatial analysis in Border Studies from a cultural studies perspective.

### Spaces of the Border: Analytical Categories and Question Perspectives

Practice-theoretical approaches distinguish themselves from traditional explanations of agency in that they focus on the body-based performance and the conceptual link between materiality and culturality. This not only serves to overcome the basis-superstructure dichotomy, but it also opens a gateway for space-oriented questions that are based on the social contingency of spaces. With very few ex-

ceptions, researchers with a practice-theoretical background refer to this only in general terms, for instance that “all social practices can be regarded as a ‘spatialising’ and organise space and its artefacts in a certain way”<sup>20</sup> (RECKWITZ 2008, p. 91); or that social practices in their physical-material disposition constitute an ‘activity-place space’ (see SCHATZKI 2002, p. 43), which should not be seen as an absolute-substantialist container but rather as “a processual, relational space of practices and relationships between participants, artefacts, places and environments”<sup>21</sup> (SCHMIDT 2012, p. 240). From the perspective of methodology SCHMIDT (2012, p. 256) refers to the fact that “in the course of globalisation developments local borders [...] rarely coincide any more with the borders of the social”<sup>22</sup> and he suggests procedures which “review the different contexts of the subjects of observation and follow the concatenations of practices via their different places”.<sup>23</sup> A multilocal procedure such as this, SCHMIDT argues, develops its objects via the various places and scenarios, maps the terrains and follows the objects and subjects in their movements.

This already touches on central aspects of the practice-theoretical spatial analysis that now need to be differentiated conceptually and further developed. Here the model *spaces of the border* presents itself. It should not be seen as a theory of cross-border agency, but rather as providing a classification of heuristic categories oriented towards spatial- and practice-theoretical considerations that open up perspectives of inquiry for an analysis of spatial constitutions in cross-border contexts. The following elucidation of these categories is not bound to the argu-

mentational sequence (a to d) chosen here.

a) According to the social-constitutive conception of space, spaces are produced in social practices, which brings the everyday, situation-dependent ‘doing’ into view. Emergences of space are accessed via analytical close-ups of the circumstances and sets of practices that mark the subjects’ everyday realities. This means it is necessary to examine the multilocally dispersed social practices of cross-border commutings in order to be able to identify the *spaces of the border* produced therein. Here, the notions of space and the practice-theoretical perspective discussed above provide suitable points of reference: If we first consider the material aspect of *spaces of the border* then we can resort to the relational notion of space that defines space as deriving from the relational structures between bodies and artefacts. Subsequently we can apply the practice-theoretical viewpoint to examine the transborder practices of cross-border commutings regarding the bodies and artefacts involved and arranged in these practices. Such an approach that focuses on the physical-material aspects of *spaces of the border* conditioning and enabling social practices takes into account their physicality and materiality in their spatial structuredness.

b) Also where the mental dimension of *spaces of the border* is concerned can we note a convergence of spatial- and practice-theoretical points. Because while the social-constitutive notion of space highlights the significance of materialities – that only constitute themselves in contact with bodies and artefacts – the central focus in the social practices is the practical knowledge that is mobilised and actualised in their performance. Both categories focus on the processes of interpretation and attribution of meaning in interaction with the material and social environment. Quoting BONGAERTS (2012, p. 23), one can here speak of an incorporated-practical meaning which is expressed through the physical performance of social practices and takes effect

20 Translation of: „Sämtliche soziale Praktiken [sich] als *spatializing* betrachten lassen und den Raum und dessen Artefakte auf bestimmte Weise organisieren“

21 Translation of: „Ein prozessualer, relationaler Raum der Praktiken und Beziehungen zwischen verkörperten Teilnehmerinnen, Artefakten, Orten und Umgebungen“

22 Translation of: „Im Zuge von Globalisierungsentwicklungen lokale Grenzen [...] kaum noch mit den Grenzen des Sozialen [...] zusammenfallen“

23 Translation of: „Die die verschiedenen Kontexte der Beobachtungsgegenstände abschreiten und den Verkettungen von Praktiken über ihre verschiedenen Orte hinweg folgen“



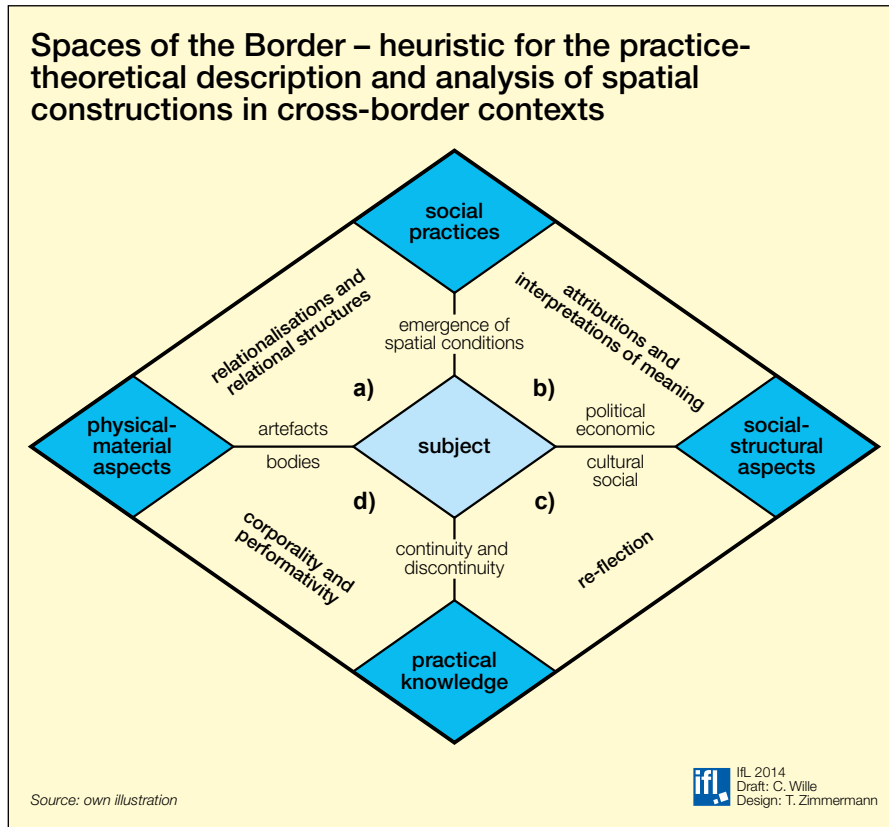


Figure: Spaces of the Border – heuristic for the practice-theoretical description and analysis of spatial constructions in cross-border contexts (The arrangement from a to d does not reflect a logical order but helps to link the figure with the commenting text.)

inter-subjectively, “without the agents having reflectively and consciously planned the meaningfulness of their behaviour or it being accessible to them in an objectively represented form”.<sup>24</sup> This touches on the implicit nature of practical knowledge which constitutes itself in the performance of agency and manifests itself in the praxis-logical (dis-)continuity of the physically and materially embedded practices. In the context of *spaces of the border* the social practices of cross-border commutings would then need to be examined regarding the logics of practice articulated therein – here as forms of interpretations and attributions of meaning – which can be assumed to be contingent in general and in cross-border contexts in particular.

c) Contingency should here not be elevated as an arbitrary factor, as subjects should always be understood as intersec-

tions of historically reshaped and culturally specific practices (see RECKWITZ 2009, p. 176; REUTER 2004, p. 246). It is thus necessary to also take into account the factors that condition and enable social practices, which are not – like social structures – situated outside the practices, but, “as continuously renewed preconditions and results of practices”<sup>25</sup> (SCHMIDT 2012, p. 202), within the practices themselves. In the model *spaces of the border* social-structural aspects are thus addressed that pertain to social, cultural, political and economical effects and are both stabilised and changed in practices. This dual character is expressed in the concept of re-flection: the continuity of social practices and hence the reflexivity or reproduction of social-structural aspects on the one hand (reflection), and on the other the discontinuity of social practices and, linked to it, the ‘inflection’ or shift of social-structural as-

pects (flection). Social practice is then to be understood “as an individualistic strategy or as a social routine, as a conscious or as a mechanical action, as an independent interpretation or as a compliance of rules”<sup>26</sup> (HÖRNING and REUTER 2004, p. 14). For the analysis of *spaces of the border* the flexive nature of social practices is of particular significance, since it helps to theoretically express the destabilisation of social-structural aspects and the productive-creative factors of interpretation and attribution of meaning.

d) The incorporated-practical meaning – as a central factor of practical knowledge – is linked to materialities in various ways, again engaging the physical-material aspects of *spaces of the border*. This involves the physical performances of practices in which signs are processed and competences demonstrated and which make practical sense for the participating bodies or subjects (see SCHMIDT 2012, pp. 59f.; RECKWITZ 2010, p. 190). This characteristic, to be understood as a “corporalising performativity” (KRÄMER 2004, p. 17) focuses on the eventfulness of the “corporal drama” (GUGUTZER 2004, p. 95) as well as the emergent interrelationship between the performing and observing body. This relationship can tell us something about the observeableness of social practices and their social understandability, which also includes conditions of heightened contingency – as for instance in a cross-border context. While, via corporality and performativity, the dimension of meaning of the social-constitutive notion of space is conceptualised here regarding its inter-subjective structure, it is also necessary to address the inter-objective structure of social practices. This involves objects and artefacts that are employed competently in social practices, and the material preconditions for specific practices to occur and be executed in the first place (see FISCHER-LICHTE 2012, pp. 161ff.;

24 Translation of: „Ohne dass [...] die Akteure die Sinnhaftigkeit des Verhaltens reflexiv-bewusst geplant hätten oder sie ihnen in objektiv repräsentierter Form zugänglich wäre“

25 Translation of: „Als stetig erneuerte Voraussetzungen und Resultate von Praktiken“

26 Translation of: „als individualistische Strategie oder als gesellschaftliche Routine, als bewusste oder mechanische Aktion, als selbstständige Interpretation oder als Regelerfüllung“

RECKWITZ 2003, p. 291). The meanings and praxis-logical utilisations of objects and artefacts emanate partly from themselves (*as appellation ...*), partly from the bodies (*... of practical knowledge*) that use them: "They [the artefacts] are handled and impose themselves, they are object of application and use and at the same time fundamentally influence the form social practices are able to take"<sup>27</sup> (RECKWITZ 2010, p. 193). The question concerning the practical meaning of objects and artefacts thus again leads to an emergent interrelationship between animate and inanimate carriers of social practices and has to be answered empirically.

We should note here that the heuristic developed above is structured in two intertwined dimensions whose intersection is the subject or, in our case, cross-border commuting. The elaborated categories are in each instance interwoven in manifold ways and operate together in the process of performance; however, separating them analytically opens perspectives of inquiry and approaches for the description and analysis of *spaces of the border*. For example, the artefacts and bodies participating in social practices – as physical-material aspects of cross-border constitutions of space – can be examined as to their arrangements. The spaces that thereby become identifiable can unfold across borders and reflect the relationalising practices of cross-border commuting in their spatial structuredness. In addition, artefacts and bodies can be studied under the performative aspect, directing the focus to issues of inter-subjectivity and inter-objectivity as well as the related issues of meanings and social (dis-)orders produced in cross-border contexts. These can furthermore be investigated under the aspect of re-reflection regarding the way political, economical, cultural or social effects influence cross-border practices or in what way the latter change the social-structural aspects.

The list of possible perspectives of inquiry could be further expanded and would have to be defined explicitly depending on the topic of investigation. In doing so it is particularly important to focus on the links between the categories developed above, because they provide the connections between culture and materiality and open space-sensitive perspectives on social phenomena in cross-border contexts. Statements about practice-theoretically conceived spaces can in that sense only be statements about their cultural and material constitutive processes that relate to the interactions or partial aspects of social practices examined in each case. One such inquiry was for instance made into work-related cross-border commuters and the spatial relationships produced in the set of practices of cross-border commuting (see WILLE 2012). The research questions focussed on the social practices in their respective meaningful and material dimensions as well as in their cross-border multi-locality: travel to work, collaboration with colleagues, communication in a foreign language, everyday practices, practices of communitisation and many others. The synopsis of the results showed that the *spaces of the border* aligned obliquely to national borders are characterised by features such as plurality, persistence, informality, conflictuality, contingency and ambivalence (see WILLE 2013, 2012). One would have to examine empirically in how far these features also characterise *spaces of the border*, such as are for instance produced by season workers, seconded managers or other (mobile) *borderlands* (see BOECKLER 2012). A study<sup>28</sup> on residential migration takes up this question focus which examines the constitution of *spaces of the border* by Luxembourgers who have moved to the neighbouring country and whose

everyday reality – this is the assumption – is located both on this and the other side of the border or 'on' the border itself. Here, a practice-theoretical approach appears to be a promising course for identifying cultural as well as material constitutive processes of *spaces of the border*.

## Conclusion

Drawing on social-geographical and culture-sociological considerations this paper developed a practice-theoretical concept of space subsequently translating it into analytical categories. The development of the *spaces of the border* model was prompted by the 'spatial blindness' in Border Studies, which largely ignore space as a theoretical category and presuppose it as a geopolitical one. This situation seems paradox, since it was only when spatial 'conditions' (e.g. Schengen agreement, fall of the Iron Curtain) were called into question that this field of study underwent a remarkable development. The range of topics of research is derived in great part from the despatialisations discussed above, but their spatial-theoretical connection is hardly ever made. The *spaces of the border* model here makes a dual contribution: It is an analytical proposal for addressing *despatialisation* under the aspect of *spatialisation*. The model can for instance be applied to phenomena of despatialisation (e.g. cross-border commutings) which in turn create new spatial situations in doing culture.

In order to make such processes visible, a concept of space was developed that takes culture and materiality in equal measure into account and attempts to identify processes of cross-border doing geography that have hitherto eluded theoretical categorisation. It functions as a construct for continuously changing contexts between elements of meaning, artefacts, bodies and the spatial orders of their manifestations. This makes clear that the *spaces of the border* model does not only lend itself to the space-sensitive description and analysis of social practices in cross-border contexts, but can basically be applied wherever the spatial di-

27 Translation of: „Sie [die Artefakte] werden gehandhabt und drängen sich auf, sie sind Gegenstand der Verwendung und Benutzung und zugleich beeinflussen sie die Form, die soziale Praktiken überhaupt haben können“

28 Substudy "Regionalisierungen und Identitätskonstruktionen im Kontext grenzüberschreitender Wohnmobilität am Beispiel Luxemburgs" (Regionalisations and Identity Constructions in the Context of Cross-border Residential Mobility with Reference to Luxembourg) (Elisabeth BOESEN, Gregor SCHNUEER and Christian WILLE) in the framework of the project "IDENT2 – Strategies of Regionalisation: Constructing Identity Across Borders" (2011-2014, University of Luxembourg).

mension of practices is the focus of interest. But it shows itself particularly well-equipped for examining sets of practices that are dispersed across both sides of a border: This is because the practice-theoretical concept of space emancipates itself from prefabricated and supra-subjectively existing structures of knowledge, as well as from geospatially defined areas of application of normative orders. This makes it possible to express conceptually and empirically contingent contexts of meaning, and at the same time to think and empirically examine space in its social contingency (in the sense of 'doing space') and detached from geopolitically drawn borders and the related notions of container space.

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## Résumé

CHRISTIAN WILLE

### **Espaces de frontière – Une perspective praxéologique dans les études frontalières orientées vers les sciences culturelles**

Cette contribution analyse comment les réflexions praxéologiques peuvent être mises en lien avec les réflexions théoriques sur l'espace et peuvent être transposées dans une heuristique de l'analyse d'espace en sciences culturelles. Ce questionnement résulte d'un point de vue considérant l'espace comme un aspect émergent du social et qui est encore en grande partie sous-défini dans les études frontalières. En se référant à diverses notions d'espace, l'étude présente d'abord une compréhension de l'espace basée sur l'action et la reformule dans une optique praxéologique. Ceci constitue le point de départ du développement du modèle « espaces de frontières » (Raume der Grenze) avec ses catégories d'analyse que sont les pratiques sociales, la connaissance pratique et les aspects physico-matériels et socio-structurels. Surtout les multiples liens entre ces catégories d'analyse se relèvent utiles pour des fins heuristiques.

Espace, frontière, praxéologie, études frontalières, études de l'espace frontalier, travailleurs frontaliers

## Резюме

КРИСТИАН Вилле

### **Border Studies: контекст практико-теоретических культурологических исследований**

В работе исследуется, как практические пространственно-теоретические идеи могут быть перенесены в эвристику культурно-научного пространственного анализа. Этот вопрос вытекает из понимания того, что пространство следует рассматривать как производный аспект «социального» и в рамках штудий Border Studies до сих пор в значительной степени недостаточно чётко определено. Прибегая к различным представлениям о пространственном концепте, вначале рассматривается и переформулируется теоретическое понимание пространства. Это является отправной точкой для развития модели Spaces of the Border с соответствующими категориями анализа, для социальных практик, практических знаний, а также физико-материальных и социально-структурных аспектов. Подтверждаются многочисленные связи между этими категориями анализа.

Пространство, граница, прaksiология, Border Studies, исследования пограничного пространства, трансграничные мигранты.